

Public attitudes to tobacco and vape regulation in Wales

Findings from the ASH Wales 2026 YouGov survey



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Key findings at a glance

The Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026 became law on 29 April 2026. It establishes the smoke-free generation, strengthens enforcement and provides powers for further controls on vaping products, including advertising, packaging, flavours and displays. From 1 January 2027, selling tobacco to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009 will be illegal.

Wales already has significant smoke-free protections in law. The Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 and regulations made under it extended smoke-free requirements to hospital grounds, school grounds and public playgrounds from March 2021.

The Tobacco and Vapes Act provides further powers that could be used to extend smoke-free protections to additional settings. It also creates powers in relation to vape-free places. However, the survey findings reported here relate only to smoking and smoke-free spaces; respondents were not asked about vape-free spaces.

- The majority of Welsh adults (63%) support progressively raising the tobacco age of sale for people born in 2009 or later, 15% oppose it.
- The vast majority (86%) support requiring businesses to hold a valid licence to sell tobacco that could be removed following repeated underage sales, only 4% oppose the proposal.
- 80% support banning sweet names, cartoons and bright colours on vape packaging.
- 72% support restricting how flavours of vapes are described.
- 80% support banning vape advertising and promotion at the point of sale, including 58% of smokers.
- The vast majority (86%) support some restrictions on vape visibility in shops, including 74% of smokers.
- The vast majority support Wales's existing smoke-free protections, including smoke-free school grounds (93%), children's play areas (93%) and hospital grounds (79%).
- There is also majority support for extending smoke-free protections to additional settings, including public transport waiting areas (77%), outdoor eating areas at restaurants, pubs and cafés (60%), beaches (60%) and parks (60%).

The survey asked specifically about smoking and smoke-free spaces. It did not ask respondents about vaping or vape-free spaces.



The findings therefore provide evidence both of public support for existing Welsh smoke-free legislation and of attitudes towards possible future extensions of smoke-free protections, including public transport waiting areas, outdoor hospitality areas, beaches and parks. They are also relevant to implementation of the smoke-free generation, retail licensing and product regulation.

The appetite for broader action is also visible in wider attitudes. Asked about government activity to limit smoking, 43% say government is not doing enough, compared with 11% who think it is doing too much. Another 31% say current activity is about right.

Proposed measure	Support
Progressively raise the tobacco age of sale	63%
Tobacco retailer licensing	86%
Ban sweet names, cartoons and bright colours on vape packaging	80%
Ban vape advertising and promotion at the point of sale	80%
Restrict how vape flavours can be described	72%
Some restrictions on vape visibility in shops	86%

Source: ASH survey of Welsh adults ran by YouGov. 'Support' combines 'strongly support' and 'tend to support'.



Smoke-free generation and retail licensing

Nearly two-thirds of Welsh adults (63%) support progressively raising the age of sale so people born in 2009 or later can never legally be sold tobacco, 15% oppose the measure. A similar 65% support the broader goal of making Britain a country where nobody smokes, 16% oppose it.

Support is still stronger for retail licensing. More than eight in ten Welsh adults (86%) favour requiring businesses to hold a tobacco sales licence that could be removed if they are caught more than once selling to underage customers, including 68% of current smokers and 77% of current vapers.



Protecting children from vape appeal and promotion

The Act seeks to protect children from nicotine addiction while retaining access to vaping for adults who smoke. The Welsh results show strong backing for measures aimed at the presentation and promotion of vapes.

Views on retail visibility are similarly clear. Overall, 86% want at least some restriction on how visible vapes are in shops. Only 6% favour no restriction. Among current smokers, 74% favour some restriction, as do 71% of current vapers.

How vape displays may influence perceptions of harm

The survey also looked at whether different ways of displaying vapes in shops might influence how people perceive their harm compared with cigarettes. Respondents were shown one of four different shop scenarios: no vape display, a colourful vape display, vapes in blank packaging across a whole shelf, or vapes in blank packaging across half a shelf.

Among those shown the colourful vape display, 58% said the display made vapes appear either less harmful than tobacco cigarettes or completely harmless. This compared with 28% among those shown blank packaging across a whole shelf, 26% among those shown blank packaging across half a shelf and 10% among those shown no vape display.



There was much less difference in whether people said they would be likely to buy a vape from the shop shown, with figures ranging from 7% to 9% across the four scenarios. The results suggest that the way vapes are presented in shops may influence perceptions of their relative harm. However, the differences have not been tested for statistical significance, so the findings should not be taken as proof that the different displays caused the differences observed.

Strong backing for smoke-free public places

Wales already prohibits smoking in a number of outdoor settings, and the survey shows very strong support for these existing protections. 93% support smoke-free school grounds and 93% support smoke-free children's play areas, while 79% support the existing ban on smoking in hospital grounds.

The survey also tested views on places where additional smoke-free protections could potentially be introduced. Support was 77% for public transport waiting areas, 69% for further education college grounds and 66% for university and college grounds. A majority also supports smoke-free outdoor seating areas at restaurants, pubs and cafés (60%), beaches (60%) and parks (60%). Two-thirds (67%) say they dislike tobacco smoke in outdoor seating areas at pubs, cafés and restaurants, compared with 6% who like it. If smoking were prohibited in these areas, 39% say they would be more likely to visit, 21% less likely and 35% just as likely. These findings relate specifically to smoking. The survey did not ask whether vaping should be prohibited in these settings and should not be used as evidence of public support for vape-free spaces.

Flavour regulation requires a careful balance

Public support for regulating youth-oriented flavour descriptions is strong, but the survey also highlights choices for secondary legislation. Among 127 current vapers asked what they would do if only tobacco, menthol or mint flavours were legally available, 48% said they would vape the same amount, 28% would vape less and 19% would stop. However, 12% said they would return to smoking cigarettes and 7% would smoke more; 40% were uncertain about the effect on their smoking.

Among the 98 respondents who expected to continue vaping, 57% said they would use the permitted flavours. Forty per cent said they would stockpile other flavours, while 14% selected seeking illicit flavours and 14% selected making their own e-liquid. This was a multiple-response question, so the figures do not sum to 100%.



These findings do not argue against flavour regulation. Instead, they support an implementation approach that distinguishes restrictions on child-oriented branding and descriptions from a very narrow permitted-flavour list. Monitoring illicit supply, providing clear guidance and preserving effective routes away from smoking will be important alongside youth protection.

Misperceptions about the relative harms of vaping and smoking remain widespread

The survey also highlights an important challenge for implementation. Among Welsh adults who are aware of vapes, 40% believe vaping is just as harmful as smoking and 14% believe it is more harmful. Therefore, a total of 54% of Welsh adults wrongly believe vaping is just as harmful or more harmful than smoking. Only 28% regard vaping as less harmful than smoking.

This matters because regulation needs to achieve two objectives at the same time: protecting children and people who do not smoke from taking up vaping, while ensuring that adults who smoke are not discouraged from switching completely away from combustible tobacco. Communications accompanying implementation of the Act should therefore provide clear and accurate information about relative risk, alongside accessible smoking cessation support.



A mandate for implementation, communication and enforcement

Taken together, the findings show substantial public support in Wales for many of the central objectives of the Tobacco and Vapes Act. There is strong backing for retailer accountability, restrictions on the promotion and visibility of vapes, measures to reduce child-oriented presentation, and the smoke-free generation.

The findings also demonstrate strong support for Wales's existing smoke-free protections, alongside majority support for extending smoke-free rules to a number of additional public settings.

Successful implementation will require more than legislation alone. It should be supported by clear public communication, properly resourced enforcement and accessible cessation support, while monitoring for unintended consequences such as movement towards illicit products or smokers being discouraged from using less harmful alternatives to cigarettes. This provides an opportunity for Wales to protect children and future generations while continuing to support adults who smoke to quit.

Methodology

The survey was conducted by YouGov plc on behalf of ASH. The total sample was 1,119 adults in Wales. Fieldwork was undertaken online between 18 February and 19 March 2026. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all Welsh adults aged 18 and over.

All percentages in this report are based on unweighted question or subgroup bases of at least 80 respondents. Figures may not total 100% because of rounding, and multiple-response questions are identified. Combined figures use the net categories supplied in the workbook. Descriptive subgroup and split-sample differences have not been presented as statistically significant unless tested. Questions about public places asked specifically about smoking and did not test attitudes towards vape-free spaces.

